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VL.—ON THE FORMS OF ORDEAL ANCIENTLY PRACTISED IN IRELAND. By
WILLIAM M. HENNESSY.

[Read January 28, 1867.]

THE subject which I have ventured to bring under the notice of the Academy this evening is one that, to illustrate it thoroughly, would require a much longer dissertation than could be included within the limits of a single paper. It is not, therefore, my intention at present to submit any lengthened observations on the question of Ordeal in general, as practised in various countries, especially as it has been described by several writers, whose works are accessible to every inquirer. Spelman and Du Cange have given pretty extensive lists of the different authorities on the origin and practice of the Ordeal, under the words "Ordalium," "Judicium Dei," or "Judicium Divinum;" but the most comprehensive and valuable guide to the subject will be found in Jacob Grimm's "Deutsche Rechtsalterthümer," under the head of "Gottesurtheil."

My reason for bringing the question of the Ancient Irish system of Ordeal under the notice of the Academy is, that in all the works which I have consulted on the matter I have found little or no reference to any of the forms used by the people of this country. It is true that Sir James Ware has devoted a brief chapter to the subject; but he mostly assumes that the English system of trial by Ordeal was introduced into Ireland by the Anglo-Normans. It is strange that the original Irish authority to which I shall presently refer should have escaped him, especially as he had the assistance in his researches of one, at least, of the best Irish scholars of his time—I mean, Duaid Mac Firbis.

It is scarcely necessary to observe that many of the methods used to distinguish between guilt and innocence, or truth and falsehood, which passed under the general name of Ordeal (from *urtheil*, the German word for *judgment*) were of Pagan origin, some of them being common to most nations before the commencement of the Christian era.

Some authors assert that the trial by Ordeal was borrowed by the European nations from the Jews, by whom it was practised at a very early age, as appears from many passages in the Old Testament; but, as the practice was common to all nations from the earliest times, it is difficult to decide.

The oldest forms of Ordeal were apparently fire and water; i. e. red hot iron, or cinders, and cold water—the hot water being, as I believe, a variation introduced within the Christian period. The instances given in the Old Testament in the cases of Achan (Josue, vii.) and Jonas (i.) indicate that the Ordeal by lot was also a very ancient form; for the falling of the lot to a person then involved guilt. It is alleged that the fire Ordeal was a luxury reserved to the noble, while the ignoble proved their guilt or innocence by cold water; but this also seems to be a change introduced during the Middle Ages, as many an-

cient authorities represent menials as undergoing the Ordeal of fire. In the tragedy of *Antigone* (v. 270) for instance, Sophocles makes an humble character express his readiness to lift "masses of red hot iron, and pass through fire," to purge himself of a charge.

It is not easy at present to ascertain the number or variety of the methods of Ordeal used by the different nations. All the Teutonic nations seem to have had nine forms (if not twelve); the inhabitants of India, according to Hastings, had nine also. The Greeks, if they had not twelve forms, appear to have had regard to the number twelve; for they used twelve hot ploughshares. The ploughshare seems to have been the instrument by which the hot iron Ordeal was anciently most usually practised. It is not in our Irish list, and I confess that its absence therefrom is not without significance. It is worthy of remark that there is no reference to the subject of Ordeal in the ancient monuments of Norse literature, except one allusion to the hot water test which occurs in the "Edda," in the third Lay of Godrun; but this poem bears internal evidence of its German origin. Nevertheless, it would be strange if a people so superstitious as the Pagan Norse should have been without some form of it, particularly as it was a regular institution among their neighbours, the Danes and Germans; although, indeed, from a passage in Helmold (1. 83) quoted by Leibnitz (p. 608), it would appear that the Sclavic nations did not practise it until after their conversion to Christianity, when the clergy interdicted them from swearing by trees, lakes, and stones, but commanded that they should pass over burning ploughshares with naked feet.

At a very early period in the history of the Christian Church we find the Ordeal of fire and water practised on the Continent, even in the case of ecclesiastics. Gregory of Tours records that the fire Ordeal was submitted to by St. Brice, the successor of St. Martin, who died in the year 412; and in the Tripartite Life of St. Patrick (p. 32 of the Irish manuscript in the Royal Irish Academy), we are told that the double Ordeal of fire and water was resorted to in the Saint's contest with the Druids of King Laeghaire. (It is curious, too, that in the latter case the Druids are represented as dissatisfied with the form suggested by St. Patrick, as if it was not in accordance with the Irish system).

At a subsequent period, and during the Middle Ages, the forms most in use throughout Europe were nine in number,—viz., hot iron, hot water, cold water, the cross, consecrated cheese, the Eucharist, corsned, *offa judicialis*, and the duel, in which latter they all eventuated. I have not met any well-authenticated instance of the use of any of these forms by the purely Irish people, unless the duel; but the earliest instance of this is not older than the year 1583.

It is possible, however, that the practice which is so frequently referred to in the lives of the Irish saints, under the name of *cpop pígell*, may represent the "*Judicium Crucis*." The meaning of the words *cpop pígell* is explained by O'Clery as a "vigil which a person makes on his knees, his hands being extended in the form of a cross." Many of the Irish saints are represented as possessing, among their other attri-

butes, the faculty of maintaining this attitude for a very long time; and as this corresponded with the original nature of the *Judicium Crucis*, according to which the person who could longest keep the arms extended was adjudged innocent, it is possible that it implies the use of this form of Ordeal by the Christian Irish.

The Irish had, however, many forms of their own: of these the most accurate list that I have met with is contained in a tract in the ancient "Book of Ballymote," fol. 143, *sq.* This list, couched in very ancient language, is included in an historical sketch of Cormac Mac Airt, monarch of Ireland in the third century, which is interspersed with some very curious legends, particularly one very remarkable one, regarding a magical branch having properties not unlike the golden branch mentioned in the sixth Book of the "Æneid." The story represents that a great assembly was convened by Cormac at Tara, for the purpose of re-arranging the rights and privileges of the several classes of the people, which had fallen into some confusion, owing to the encroachments of the Irish poets; on which occasion the twelve *Fir Flatha* were publicly proclaimed before all. They were called *Fir Flatha*, or "truth of sovereignty," because the Irish anciently considered that the standard of truth and morality depended on the character of the sovereign or prince, the justice or injustice of whose rule was supposed to affect not only the moral character of the people, but also the seasons, and even the very productive powers of nature.

They are enumerated as follows, viz.:—

Do bpeā, mooppo, in ba Pīp ōec Flatha op āipō aca. Aciac-
pīde no būip ic ecipgleōd pīp ī bpecc acco, īciāpō īāpīn ī.
Tal Mochta, Trepīn Moraind, Crandchur Seanā, Leaptar
badhuir, Trelia Mocāip, Corī Pīp, Seancpan Sin mic Aigi, Iarn
Luāta, aīpīōm oc Altoir, Cuac Cormaic.

"The twelve *Fir Flatha* ('Truths of Sovereignty') were publicly proclaimed by them. These were used by them to distinguish between truth and falsehood. Here they are, viz.:—*Tal Mochta* (Mochta's Adze), *Tresin Moraind* (the triple-Sin, or Collar, of Morand), *Crandchur Seanā* (the Lots of Seanā), *Leastar Badhuir* (Badhuir's Goblet), *Trelia Mohair* (the Three Stones of Blackness), *Corī-fir* (True-cauldron), *Seancrann Sin mic Aigi* (the charmed branch of Sen Mac Aige), *Iarn Luchta* (Luchta's Iron), *Airesom oc Altoir* (Waiting at an Altar), *Cuach Cormaic* (Cormac's Cup)."

Tal Mochta ī. tal uime pō bai la Moēta paep, pō cuptea a
cemio bpoigim he, ī dō bepte ceanga caipī; īci lāpambō co pō
loīpceō; īci ba hannaō nī loīpceō īcip.

"*Tal Moetha*, i. e. a bronze adze which Mochta, a carpenter, had. It was wont to be put into a fire made of blackthorn, and a tongue was rubbed over it. It would burn the person who had falsehood; but the person who was innocent it would not burn."

The axe or adze was, of course, an instrument held in high esteem among all primitive people. Herodotus, Book iv., has a curious account of an axe preserved with great veneration by the ancient Scythians, in whose territory it fell from heaven in a glowing state, together with a plough, yoke, and cup. I believe that the peasantry of the south and west of Ireland still consider that the possibility of rubbing the tongue over a red-hot iron is not to be doubted.

The next is the

Τρεπιν Μοραν, i. e. the triple Collar of Moran.

This Moran was the son of Cairbre Cinn-Cait (Carbreus Feliceps, or Carbry the Cat-headed), who is stated to have usurped the throne of Ireland in the first century of the Christian era, on the success of the rebellion of the Aithech-Tuatha, or plebeians, otherwise incorrectly called the Attocotti.

O'Flaherty, in his corrected Chronology, refers the usurpation of Carbry to the year A. D. 90. The legend regarding the origin of the first and most celebrated collar of Moran is rather wild. It represents that Carbry was severely punished, in his offspring, for the excesses committed under his leadership by the plebeians, who nearly extirpated the governing classes. Every child born to him, the legend relates, was so deformed, that it had to be destroyed. At the suggestion of his wife, Carbry convened the *Feis*, or Assembly, of Tara, and requested all present to prefer a supplication to their gods, to the end that he might be favoured with a happy offspring. Subsequently, on the birth of Moran, it was manifest, the legend proceeds, that supplications preferred in favour of an iniquitous man like Carbry amounted to an insult to the gods; for the child was a hateful object, his features being enveloped in a thick hairy circle. The king ordered him to be taken to a pond, and drowned; but a *fear sidhe* (fairy man) appeared to the queen, and commanded that the child should be taken to the sea, and that his head should be held until nine waves passed over it. This command was observed; and after the ninth wave had passed, the hairy circle became loosened, and formed a collar round his neck. The story goes on:—

Ό οπισθεν κυμβαχ οιν γ αργυρ λεριν ιμον πρεαβανν ριν, copob é ριν ρίν Μιc Μάιν ιapum. In cín̄tač ma taβap̄ta bpaγau no čačtaβ. No ρiab, imoppo, uime co lap diambab eannoc.

“ A covering of gold and silver was made by him round this collar, which was afterwards the Collar of Mac Main (another name for Moran). The guilty person round whose neck it was put it would choke; it would fall down to a man's waist if he was innocent.”

The traditions respecting the efficacy of this Moran's Collar are still fresh in the memory of the Irish-speaking population, and enter largely into Irish romance.

With reference to the nine waves mentioned in the foregoing legend, it is worthy of remark here (though I may again have occasion to ad-

vert to the subject), that the number nine was undoubtedly the mystic number with the Pagan Irish, of which fact there is abundant evidence, both in writing and tradition. But the property of a ninth wave seems to have been regarded as of particular significance. Thus, our historical writers assert that, on the landing of the Milesian colonists in this country, the natives, by the advice of their Druids, stipulated that the strangers should re-embark, and put out to sea to the distance of nine waves; and if they succeeded in reaching land once more, they should have a portion of the soil. In the neighbourhood of the shore where this trial is stated to have taken place (Kenmare estuary), the inhabitants profess to believe that the waves approach the land in successions of nine, and that the last wave of the nine is always the largest.

The third is thus described :—

ԾԱՅ ԵՄ ՔԻՆ ԱՆԼ ՄՈՐԱՆԾ ՆՈՅ .I. ԼԱՅՈՒ ՄՈՐԱՆՆ ՄՈՔ ԲՐԵՃԱԸ ԸՓ ՔՈԼ ԱԲՐԵԱԼ, Դ ՆՈ ԵՔԵՐ ԵԻՔԻՐԵԼ ՆԱԾ, Դ ԽԾ ՄԱ ԵՐԱՅԻՈՒ. ԻՆ ԵԱՆ ԵՄ ԼԱՅՈՒՆ ՄՈՐԱՆ ԾԲԱ ԵՄՆ ՕՐ ԵՆԾԵՐՆ Ծ ՔՈԼ ԻՄԱՆԱՐՈՒՄ ԵՐ ՔՐԻ ԵՄԱՆԻ ԾԻԱ ԵՄԱԼԱՅԻՆ ՕՐ ԵՐՔՐԻՆ ԻՆ ԵՄՐԵԼ ԻՄԱ ԵՐԱՅԻՆ ԻՄԵՈՄԱՐԵԱՆ ԵՐ, ԵՐՈ ՔԻՆ, Ա ՄՈՐԱՆԾ, ՕԼ ՔԻ ? ԱՅՈՒ, ՕԼ ԿԱԻՄԻՆ ՕՐՔՆ, ԽԾ ՔԻՆ ՄՈՐԱՆԾ ՕՆԵՍ ԸՓ ԵՐԱԸ ԽԵ. ԱՆ ԵԱՆ, ԵՈՒ, ԵՐ ԵՐԵԱԾ ՄՈՐԱՆՆ ԵՐԵՃ, ՆՈ ԴԵԵԾ ԵՐԻՐԵԼ ԻՄԱ ԵՐԱՅԱԸ, Դ ՈՒ ԱԲՐԱՆ ԴՅԱ ԻՐԱՄ.

“Morann had, moreover, another collar, viz., Morann the great judging went to the Apostle Paul, and brought from him an epistle, which he used to have round his neck. As Morann went towards his fort, on returning from Paul, he met a bondmaiden of his bondmaidens at the door of the fort. When she saw the epistle round his neck, she asked him, ‘What is that, O Morann?’ asked she. ‘Egad,’ said the fool Caimin, ‘it will be Morann’s Collar from this day forth.’ When Morann delivered judgment, he put this epistle round his neck, and he uttered not falsehood afterwards.”

In connexion with this epistle, it is curious that Achilles Tatius (“De Amoribus Clitophontis,” Lugd. Batav., 1640, p. 514) describes a fountain near Ephesus which had the virtue of detecting falsehood in this wise :—The oath which a person had sworn was written in a letter, which was attached to his neck. On his descending up to his thighs in the fountain, the water remained stationary if he had sworn truly; but, if falsely, the water rose up, and touched the epistle, or tablet (*tabella*).

The fourth was another Collar of Moran :—

ԵԱՐ ՔԻՆ ԱՆԼ ԼԵ ՄՈՐԱՆՆ .I. ԵՐԱՐԵ ԵԵՐ ԵԱՐ ԼԱՐ ԱՄԱԼ ԵՐԵԱԼԼ ՔԵՐԱ. ԻՆ ԵՐԱՐԵ ՔԻՆ ԵՄ, ԵՐ ԵՐԵՐՈՄ Օ ՕԿԱՄՈՆ ՕՐՔՆ ԱՐ ՔԻՐՈ

* *Sin* (pron. sheen). This is a play on the word *sin*, the Irish dem. pron. “that”—*cid sin*, “what is that?”

arremm arpoðartrøm ipobain 7 do muncí mbecpín leip ar abco-
nairc rium ipin pið bað ne pet ipin ðeiliðs þip 7 gai anb. ðo
berþea ðin in muncí pin im ðoip no im laim in ðuine, 7 non iaðao
uime co teannað a ðoip no a laim ðe mað ðuað, níp míoð uime,
imorpo, ðiambað ennac.

“Morann had another collar, viz., a little circlet which he had, like
a wooden collar. This circlet, then, he obtained from Ocamon, a fool,
on Sidh Arfemhin (the most celebrated fairy hill of Munster, near the
River Suir); for he sent him there to bring him this little circlet, which
he had seen used in the *Sidh* to distinguish [between things] true and
false. This collar was [wont to be] put round a man’s hand, or leg,
and it would tighten until it would cut off the hand or leg if he were
criminal; it would not tighten if he were innocent.”

The fifth form is described as:—

Cpannúp Seancai .i. Cpanchup bai la Seancha mac Aililla .i.
ða cpanð ðo cup .i. cpanð ðið ðon píð 7 cpanð ðon líteað; ða
mað cincað ðo leanað a cpann ða boip. ðamað ennac, imorpo,
ticeað po ceboip a cpanð app. Íp amlaio ðo gñicí pin .i. ðiðeoval
píleð ðo ðantain poppo.

“Crannchur Seanchai, i. e. a crannchur (casting of lots) which Se-
ancha, son of Ailill, had, viz.:—Two lots were put—one of them for the
king, and one for the litigant. If he [the latter] was guilty, his lot ad-
hered to his hand; if innocent, moreover, his lot did not adhere (*lit.*,
came forth immediately). The way in which this was done was by
chaunting a poetical incantation over them.”

Seancha Mac Aililla is alleged to have lived in the first century of
this era. The present practice of casting lots is, no doubt, a relic of the
old Pagan custom; but fortunately we do not at present attach crimi-
nality to the failure, as seems to have been the case with the Irish, in
common with the Jews, as appears from the instances already cited re-
garding Achan and Jonas.

The next is—

Leartar baðuipn .i. baðuipn pið. Luid ðin a bean piðe ðon tið-
pað conacca ða mnai ap na piðaið ocun tiðpað; 7 bai plabpað
epeðuina eturpo. Ot ðoncabar in mnai ðia paigis lotar þon
tiðpað; luidpiðe ðin nanðiað þon tiðpað, conacca namra ipin tþið
.i. lertar glan. Þear ðo bepeað teðpa bpiatðar gða þaip conþeapað
þop aláim hi tþi; þear atbepeað teopra bpiatpa þipa þoa con-
tegeð app[ri]rði. Gaið ðin bean baðuipn in lertar pin ðo aep in
tíðe. ðo berþea ðípi inði pin; comba heaðpin leartar no ðealaí-
ðeð gai 7 þip la baðuipn.

“Badhurn’s *Leastar* (or vessel), i. e. King Badhurn. His wife went
to the well, and she saw two women from the *Sidhe* (fairy residences)

Gentiles were the *Coiri fir*, and *Crandeur Cutruma* (mutual lots), and *Airisium in Altair* (waiting at an altar). Hence has arisen the custom of putting lots in reliquaries, still practised by the Gaeidhel."

It is to be regretted that we are not able to fix the date of the original composition of the tract from which these passages have been extracted; but probably the concluding sentence of the foregoing paragraph is only an observation added by the scribe of "The Book of Ballymote," who wrote about the year 1391. I am afraid the description of the gold and silver vessel which was set to boil over a fire is rather imaginative, and indeed I am inclined to doubt the alleged antiquity of the hot water Ordeal in this country at all. The statement that the "Cauldron of Truth" was one of the three most usual forms of Ordeal with Gentiles, I consider to refer to the Gentiles of other countries.

The next form is:—

Seancrand Sin .i. Crandcup Sin mic Aigi .i. tpi crand bo cup an upci .i. crand na platha 7 crand in ollamain 7 crand in liciḡ. Da mbeḡ cin aga tciḡeb a crand an iḡtar; biamab annoc, imoppo, tciḡeb ap uaḡtar.

"*Seancrand Sin*, i. e., the charmed branch of Sen, son of Aige, viz. :—Three lots were put in water—the Prince's lot, the Ollamh's lot, and the lot of the litigant. If the litigant was guilty, his lot went to the bottom; but if indeed he was innocent, it came to the surface."

This Sen Mac Aige is mentioned in the Irish Law Tracts as a distinguished Judge, who lived before the time of St. Patrick, and whose judgments were necessarily delivered with care, because whenever he delivered a false opinion his cheek became disfigured by three blotches. The principle of the cold water Ordeal here indicated is directly opposed to that which obtained in the other European countries. In Germany, England, France, and the Continent generally, when this test was resorted to, the accused, having a rope fastened round his body, was cast into the water; if he floated on the surface, he was deemed guilty; if he sank, he was deemed innocent, and immediately drawn out. On this subject Grimm remarks:—"Herein an old Heathen superstition seems to prevail, that the holy element, the pure stream, will receive within it no misdoer" ("D. R. A.," p. 923). It is possible, also, that the notion that the criminal would not sink implied some subtle idea of demoniacal possession, and of the nature of a spirit. The belief that a witch could not sink was painfully illustrated in England about two years ago, in the case of a poor man who, on suspicion of witchcraft, was worried to death by a crowd of people, who threw him into the water to see if he would sink.

But, if the Irish notion implied in the foregoing form differed from the idea prevalent amongst the European nations, it seems to have agreed with the opinion current among the Jews and other Eastern peoples. It will be remembered, for instance, that the axe head which

fell into the water, 'as mentioned in the 2nd Book of Kings (vi. 5.), floated through the justice of Elisha. Many Pagan writers also relate that, when the Ordeal by cold water was tried in parts of Asia, the tablet on which an oath was inscribed sank in the water if the oath was false, but floated on the surface if the oath was true.*

Իարն Լուժժա .i. Լուժժա Ծրաւ Ծօ շուարձ Ծա ճլաւմ լլեժժա, Կո-
նաճա ո՛ր ինճոս օճճա լԵ ծելոճոս բիրոնԾ յ ԵրէջԾ, լարն Ծօ
բենաճ ԼԻ անծրսոնԾ յ ա ճօր ա շումԾ լարն Կոմաճ Ծարճ, յ ա
ճաԲարժ բօր Ծօր ին Լուճ. Ո՛ր ԼուրճԾ, իմօրրօ, ԼԵ ԾամԲԵժ Եւն
օճճա ; ու Ծենաճ սրճօնԾ Ծօ մոնա ԲԵժ Եւնճաճ. ԱճԲԵրժ Լուժժա
լարն բիր, ո՛ր ԿԵրաճ ա Լար աճամ ԾԻ բիր Երենն, բօր բԵ, բս Ծօ
ծելոճոս Եւր բիրոնԾ յ Երէջ. Օ՛ր ԵրԵժ Լուժժա ա լարն բենճ Լար
լարԵան Կոմա լԵ ծելոճոս Եւր ճա յ բիր, ԿոնԾ Ծերն ԼանԵար
լարն բԵ[ն]ճա Բար աճ ճաԵւԵալս Ծօ ճրԵր.

Another test is described as :—

"*Iarn Luchta* (Luchta's Iron). i.e., Luchta, a Druid, went to learn in Letha, where he saw a wonderful thing used by the people to discriminate between truth and untruth. A piece of iron was charmed by their Druids, and afterwards put into the fire until it was red, and it was placed on the hand of the litigant. It would burn him if he had guilt; it would not injure him unless he was guilty. Luchta subsequently said that he would require it for the men of Erin, to distinguish between truth and untruth. Luchta afterwards brought his charmed iron with him, and had it determining between false and true; and hence it is that charmed iron is still continually used by the Gaoidhel."

The Letha to which the Druid Luchta is stated to have gone for the purpose of learning may doubtless be understood as representing the present district of Brittany in France, which was anciently called *Letha* by the Irish. It is true that they also applied the name of Letha to Italy, or Latium, and that the celebrated Druid, Mogh Ruith (Magus Rotæ), who lived in the third century, is asserted to have gone thither to learn from Simon Magus. But, bearing in mind Cæsar's account of the state of Druidism in Gaul in his time, it is more probable, if Luchta ever left Ireland for the alleged purpose of improving his knowledge of the Druidic institutions, that he directed his journey towards the Armorica Letha than to the Italian Letha.

The mode in which the hot iron Ordeal is said in the foregoing description to have been practised by the Irish agrees with the most ancient accounts that we possess. I believe the earliest evidence of the use of the hot iron is to be found in Sophocles, who, in his tragedy of *Antigone* (verse 270), represents one of his characters as confessing himself ready to lift masses of red hot iron, and appeal to the gods, to purge himself of the suspicion of guilt.

* See Stephanus "De Palicis," and Aristotle's Works.

The next form is:—

Արթրեմ և Ալեծր .i. ծըրծած ու ծծ՝ առնո քոն ամբարքոն ծո
 ծելոցած ետր ճախ քի քի .i. արթրեամ օգ ալեծր .i. լեծծ քա .i. ք.
 աւմեծալլ ու հալոքա, քի սրծ ծոլ արթր քրա ծեծաձալ Օրսած քար.
 ծա քորթել, արթրո, քոմարէա ա քեծած քար ծամած ծոնտած; ու
 ծոնած, արթրո, քրծոն ծո ծամած անծա.

“*Airisem ie Altoir* (Waiting at an Altar), i. e. a proof they had at that time to distinguish between false and true; i. e. waiting at an altar, viz.:—to go nine times round the altar, and to drink water afterwards, Druidical incantations having been uttered over it. Manifest, indeed, was the sign of his transgressions on a man, if guilty; it harmed him not, if innocent.”

This test, according to my original authority, was borrowed from the Israelites by Cai Cainbrethach, one of the companions of the sons of Milesius, who introduced it into Ireland. He is also stated to have introduced many other regulations, especially certain provisions in the ancient laws and institutes of this country, which are asserted to have been founded on the *Recht Maoisi*, or Mosaic law, and are alleged to have been observed until superseded by the laws enacted through the influence of St. Patrick. The process certainly bears a striking resemblance to the ordeal described in Numbers, v., where the woman suspected of adultery is made to drink bitter waters on which the priest had heaped curses; and, if guilty, her flesh rotted.

It is asserted by some writers that the ordeal was originally adopted by Christian nations from the Jews; but I think that it was common to all primitive peoples, whether from any idea inherent in the human mind that retribution in some shape or other was sure to follow criminality, I shall not take it upon me to say. The ceremonial of going round a place or an object was Pagan, as it is Christian. The word *altoir* is no doubt a loan word, representing the Latin *altare*; but this does not affect the subject much, as the Irish scribes were in the habit of substituting modern expressions for ancient terms. It is probable that the circuit was performed round a “cairn;” and St. Colum-Cille may have referred to the practice in his invocation to God before the battle of Cul Dremne, fought in 561, when he implores the Divine protection against

“The host that marches round a cairn.”

The last of the *Fir Flatha* enumerated in the list is the article called *Cuach Cormaic*, or “Cormac’s Cup,” which broke into three pieces when three false words were uttered over it; but became united again when a similar number of true words were spoken. The way in which King Cormac obtained possession of this inestimable treasure is described in a legend, which, as it contains some genuine elements of ancient Irish romance, I would be tempted to quote, but it is altogether too long; besides, it has been already partly published by Standish Hayes O’Grady, Esq., in the “Transactions of the Ossianic Society,” vol. iii., p. 212.